

Vital Records as Part of Continuity of Operations Planning

National Archives and Records
Administration
Southwest Region
Fort Worth, Texas

Part 1: Definitions

An Emergency

- An emergency means a situation or an occurrence of a serious nature, developing suddenly and unexpectedly, and demanding immediate action. This is generally of short duration, for example, an interruption of normal agency operations for a week or less.



An exclusive photo by Robert Pollard, Jay Glenewinkel Collection (www.mopac.com)

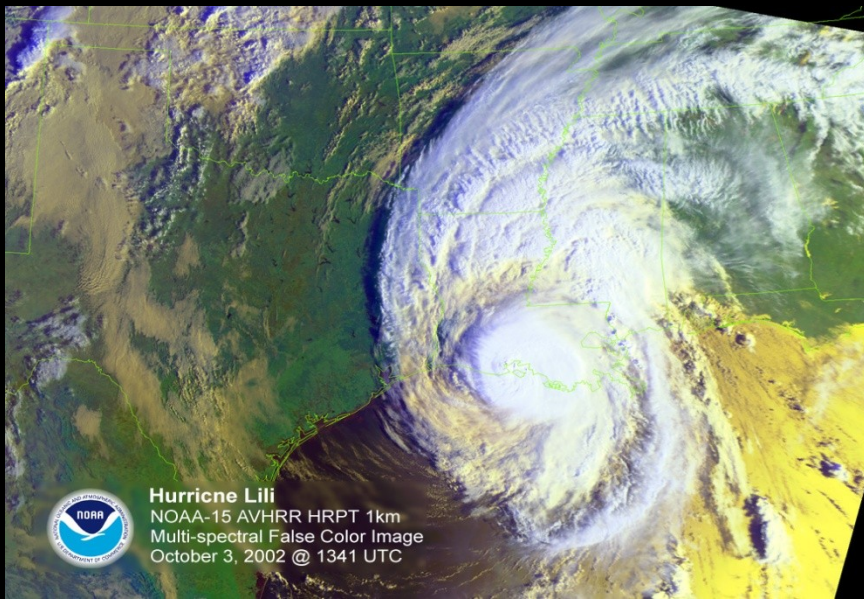
San Francisco after 1906 earthquake
{NARA photo : NWDNS-92-ER-2})

A Disaster

- Means an unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction and distress and having long-term adverse effects on agency operations.
- Each agency defines what a long-term adverse effect is in relation to its most critical program elements.

Exercise

1. Make a list of possible (local) disasters
2. Make a list of possible emergencies

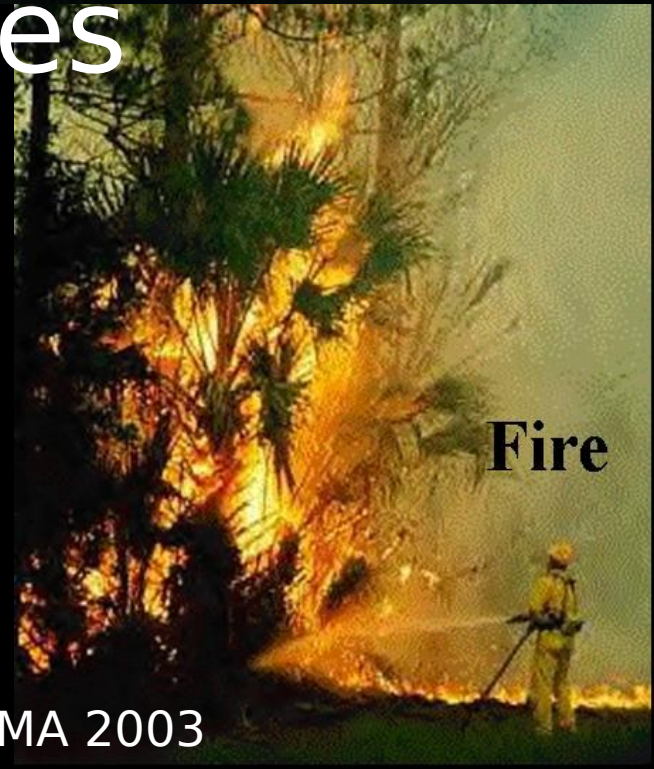


Tornado

All shapes and sizes



Chemicals



Fire

FEMA 2003

FEMA 2003

Bayou LaFouche, Louisiana

Photo by
NOAA

Not if but when





COOP

What is COOP?

The Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) assures all U.S. government agencies remain capable of continuing minimum essential functions across a wide range of potential emergencies

What is a Record?



Definition
of a
Record

" Any book, paper, map, photograph, machine-readable, or other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics. . .

....preserved or appropriate for preservation...as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government, or because of the informational value of the data contained therein... "

44 U.S.C. 3301

What is a Vital Record?



Vital
Records

- ***Vital records*** mean **essential** agency/business records that are **needed to meet operational responsibilities** under national security emergencies or other emergency or disaster conditions (emergency operating records) **or to protect the legal and financial rights** of the Government/business and those affected by

Vital Records

Those records you would need, after a disaster, in order to continue your mission. The records you need to service both your internal and external customers.



Examples: Policies and Procedures, Contracts, Payroll

What do Vital Records have to do with COOP?

- Vital Records Programs and Plans should be part of the Continuity of Operations Plans and emergency preparedness
- Contingency planning is critical to laying the foundation for both plans. Appropriate staff should be involved in the process




Examples of Vital Records

- **Emergency Operating Records**
 - orders of succession and delegations of authority
 - staffing assignments
 - vital records inventories
- **Legal and Financial Rights Records**
 - payroll and retirement records
 - insurance records
 - certain contracts, entitlements, and leases

Can you be more specific?

Unfortunately, no.



Each business or agency's functional responsibilities and business needs are different. So each must decide what records fit the definition and assign responsibilities for those records to appropriate staff.

Vital Records Plan



Vital Records
Plan

- Itemized list by series of records designated as vital
 - List includes:
 - Location
 - Owner or person responsible for vital records
 - Volume
 - Description
 - Other relevant information
 - legal citations, involves Privacy Act.

Part 2: Why?

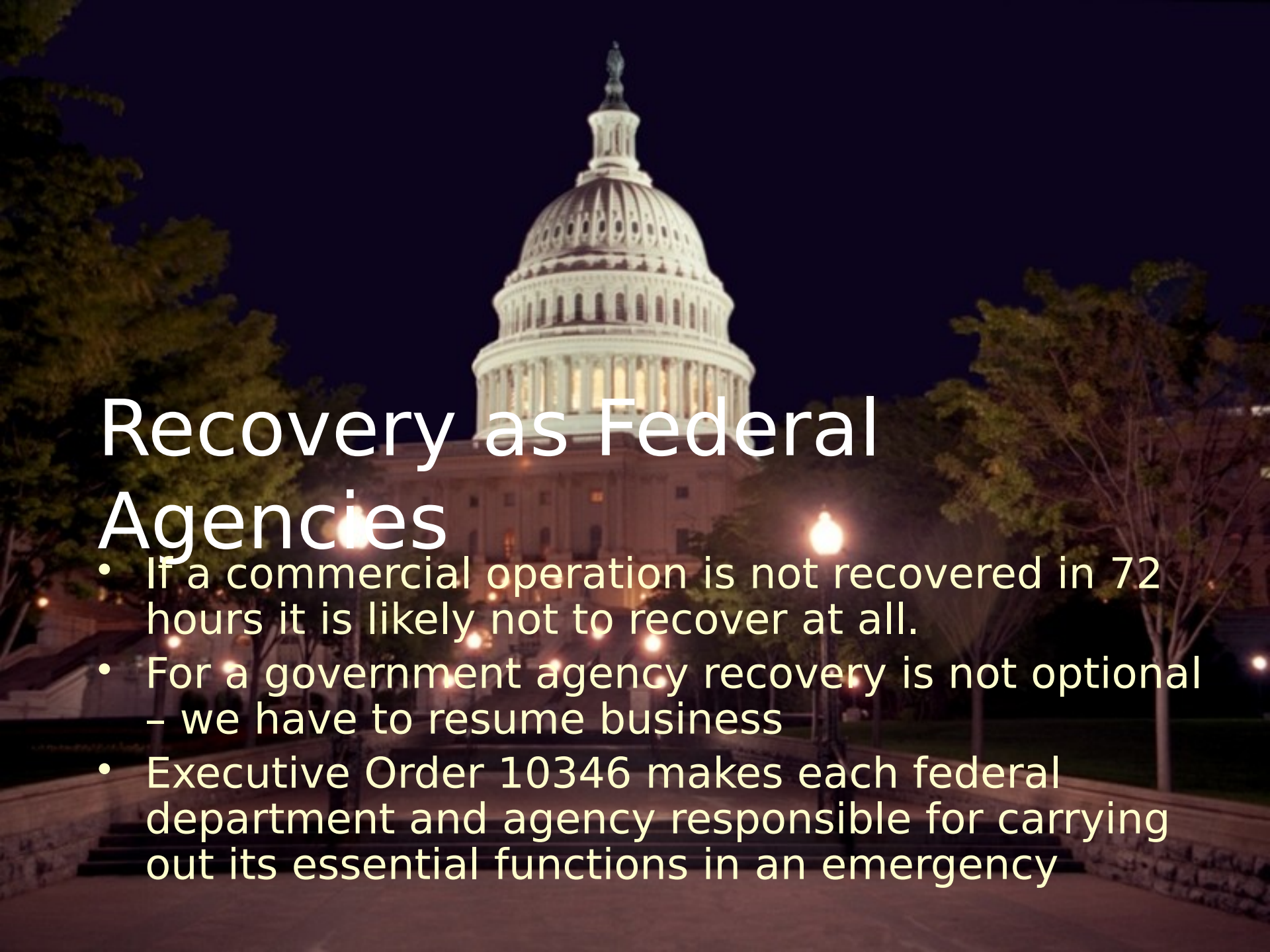
Why Do You Need a Plan?

- Organized Chaos vs. Pure Chaos
 - Sets responsibilities and roles
 - Sets priority on system and record recovery
 - Designates Signature Authorities
- Meets State, Local and Federal Requirements

Why are Vital Records Important?

A Vital Records Plan does two things:

- Provides the agency/business with information it needs to conduct business under other than normal operating conditions and resume business afterwards.
- Enables officials to identify and protect vital records.

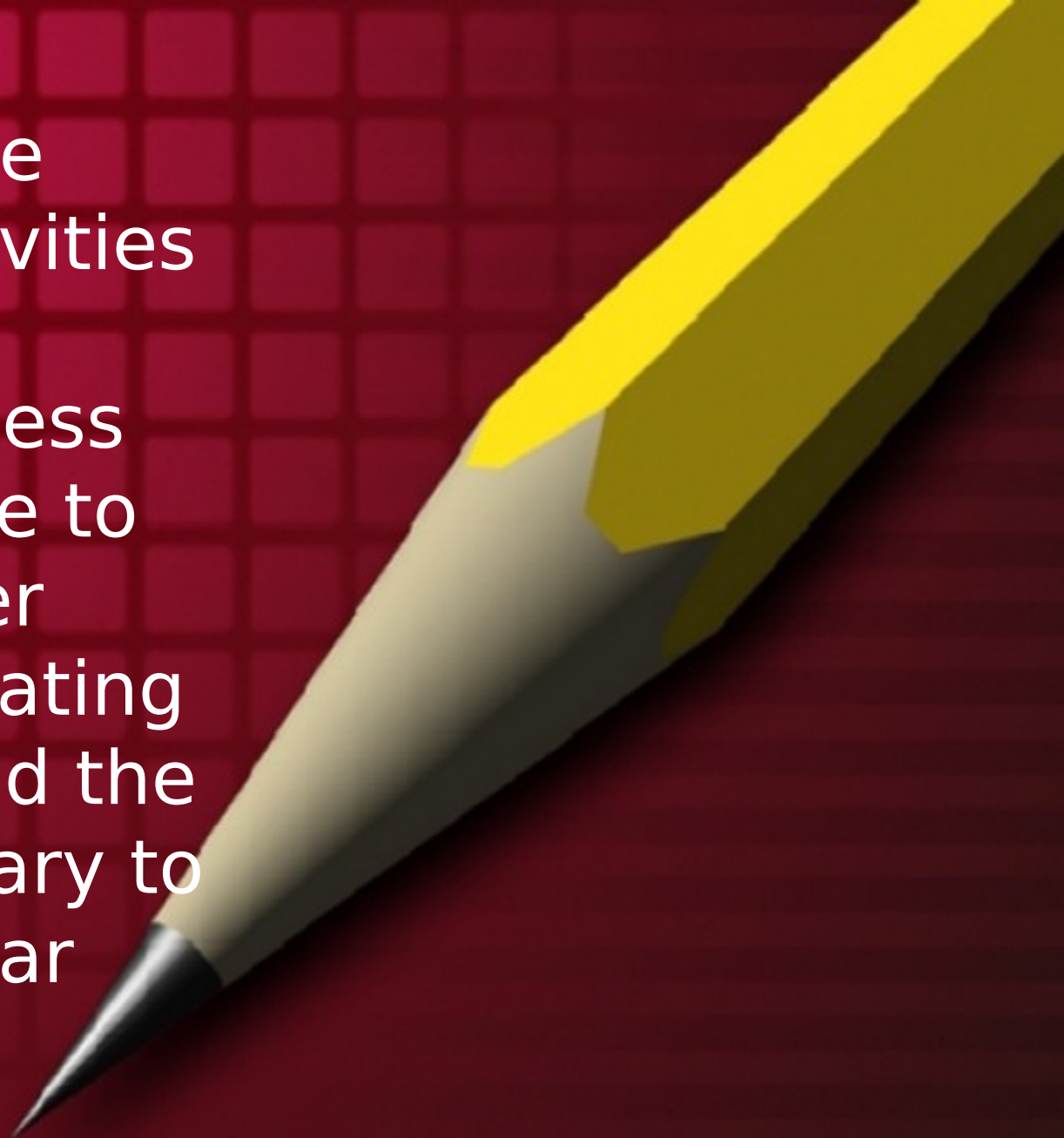
A nighttime photograph of the U.S. Capitol dome, illuminated from within, with trees and streetlights in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

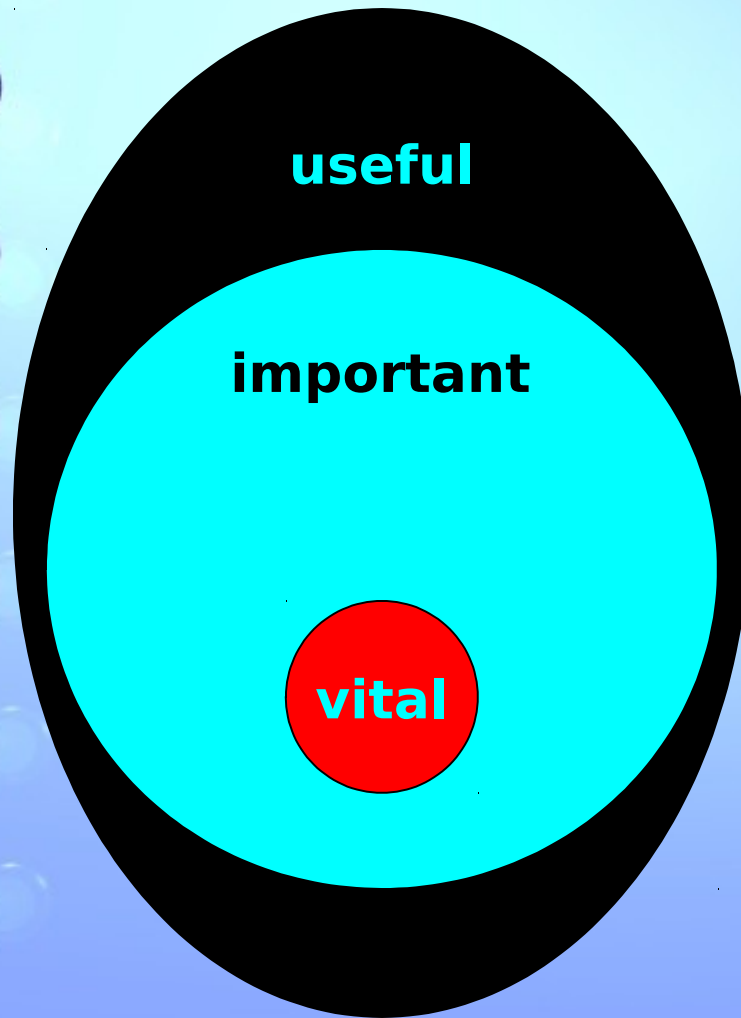
Recovery as Federal Agencies

- If a commercial operation is not recovered in 72 hours it is likely not to recover at all.
- For a government agency recovery is not optional – we have to resume business
- Executive Order 10346 makes each federal department and agency responsible for carrying out its essential functions in an emergency

Part 3: Getting Ready to Create a Plan

Determine the essential activities that the agency/business must continue to perform under adverse operating conditions and the steps necessary to resume regular business operations.





Identify general categories of records that support essential activities and the resumption of normal business.

Identify which records contain information needed to protect the legal and financial rights of the agency/business and those persons directly affected by the actions of the agency/business.



Think about who you serve

- External
 - Citizens/Consumers
 - Other Government Agencies/Business
- Internal
 - Other Offices within your Agency/Business
 - Staff



Exercise: Vital Functions/Vital Records

Directions:

1. List your business/agency's vital functions
2. Compile a list of related records to one of these functions

What are you looking for?

- **Determine most critical activities**
- **Identify records that may support critical activities and business resumption**
- **Identify legal and financial rights records**
- **Develop records recovery information**



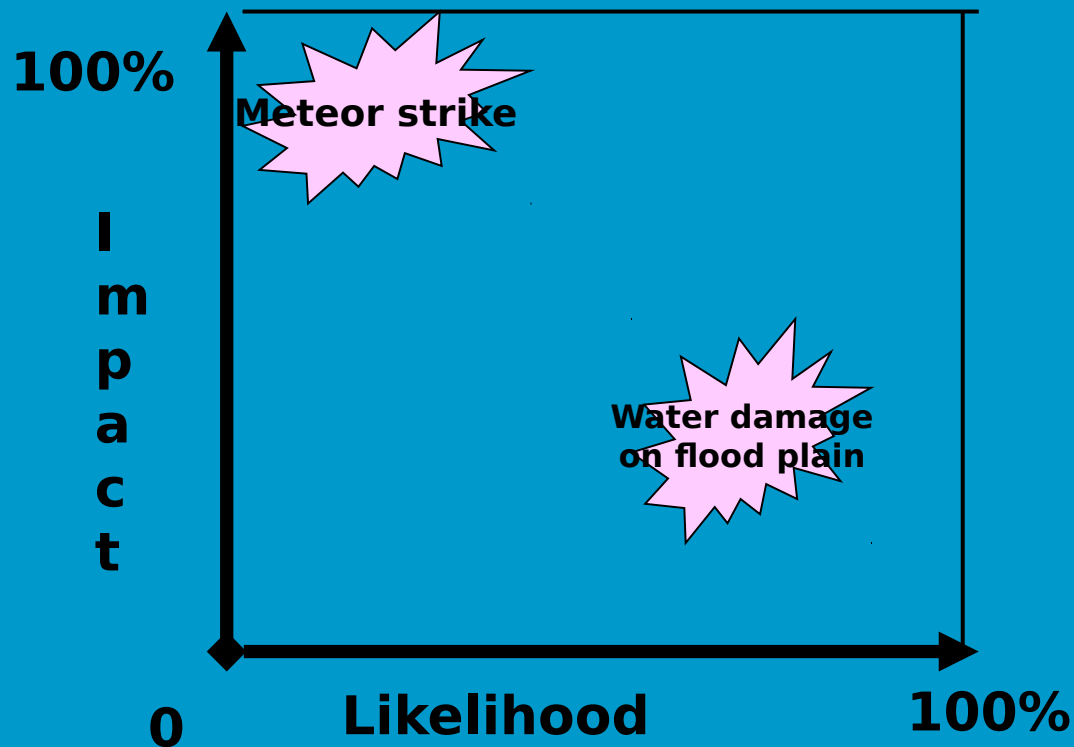
Evaluate potential hazards to operations and records.

- **What are your assets?**
- **What are your risks?**
- **How do you rate these risks?**

What are your risks?

- 1. Most severe conceivable;
national scope**
- 2. Severe localized natural disaster**
- 3. Destruction of major building;
working hours**
- 4. Destruction of major building;
non-work hours**
- 5. One or two functions affected**
- 6. Sub-function affected**
- 7. Lost document**

How do you rate these risks?



Part 4: Nuts and Bolts

Identifying
Records

Conduct Physical Records Inventories

- Know what you have.
- Why you have it.
- Where to find it in normal situations.
- Where to find it when things are far from normal.
- Answer the question – is it vital?



(Remember to think, is this critical in order to function...)

Vital Records Inventory

The background image shows a close-up of a person's hands working with documents. One hand, wearing a silver watch, is holding a piece of paper. The other hand, wearing a black watch, is holding a yellow pencil. The documents appear to be forms or records, with some text and tables visible. The overall scene suggests a process of reviewing or organizing records.

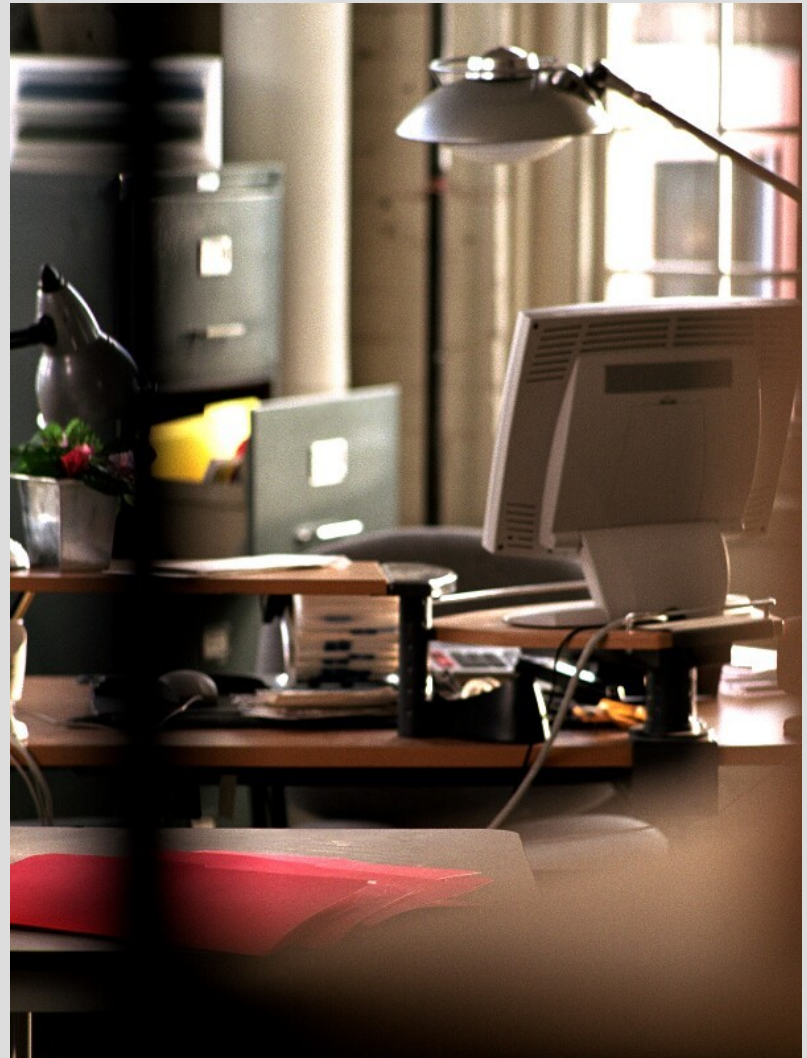
- Embedded in Records Control Schedule
- Individual stand alone document

Who Has Vital Records?

- If you ask anyone they will all respond they do
- There are records, important records and vital records
- Remember vital relates to the mission and those that keep you functioning to meet customer and mission needs and requirements.

Vital Records Inventory includes:

- **Description of the records, including media**
- **Update cycle**
- **Specific location of original and duplicates**
- **When the records are needed following an emergency or disaster (recovery priority)**
- **Protection method**

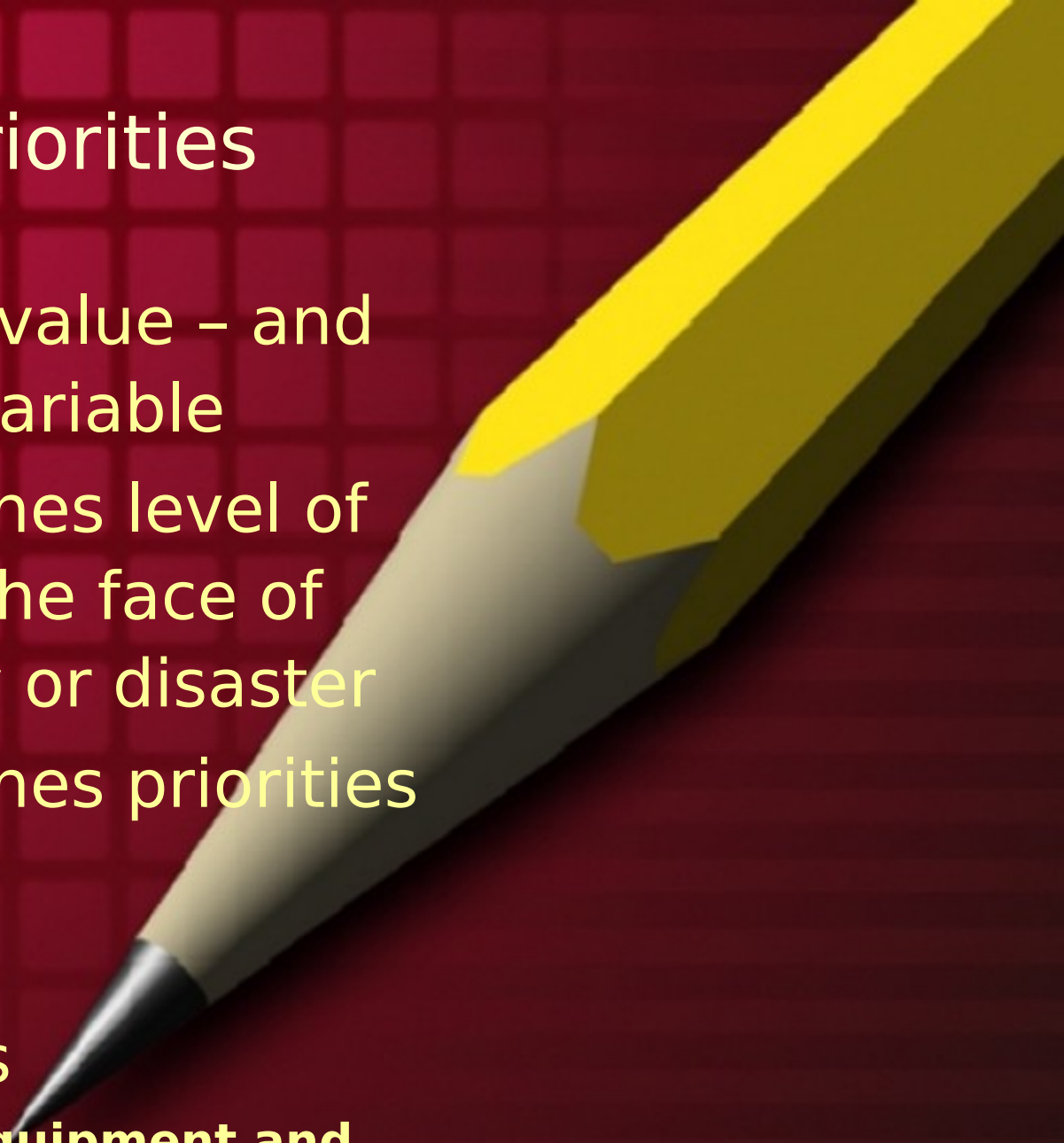


Vital Records Description Includes

- **Name, inclusive dates, and information content**
- **Volume**
- **Arrangement**
- **Frequency of use or retrieval**
- **Physical format**

Determine Priorities

- Records have value – and that value is variable
- Value determines level of protection in the face of an emergency or disaster
- Value determines priorities for recovery
- Special media considerations
 - **computer equipment and data**
 - **microform and audiovisual**



Exercise

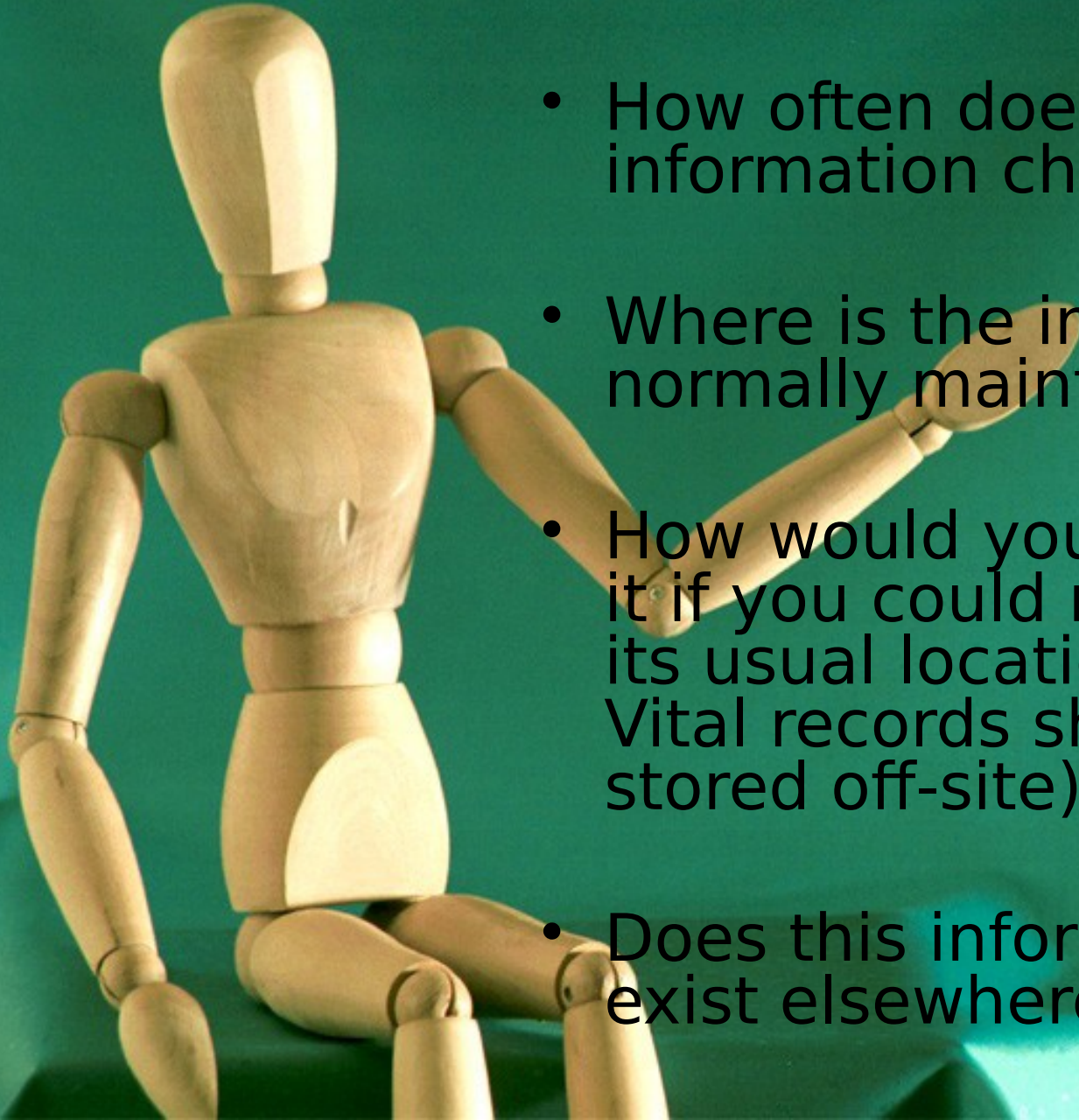
Directions:

1. Look at the function and records chosen in the previous exercise.
2. Are they Vital or Important Records?
3. Evaluate if the records are needed immediately or can they wait?
4. How are these going to be protected and made available in an emergency/disaster?

Part 5: PROTECTION

So the records are
vital
now what?

So its Vital – Now What?



- How often does the information change?
- Where is the information normally maintained?
- How would you recover it if you could not go to its usual location? (Hint: Vital records should be stored off-site)
- Does this information exist elsewhere?

Protection Considerations

- **Suitability for record media**
- **Cycle of update**
- **Need for accessibility**
- **Cost-effectiveness**



Duplication and Dispersal

- As Records Managers we constantly preach to cut the extra copy habit. Vital records are an exception.
- Alternative mediums – microfiche/film, discs/drives and the like



It Will Last Forever!



- CDs and DVDs
 - Rot
 - Out-dated compression
 - Out-dated format
 - Obsolete Technologies
 - The Producers Promise of Replacement

PROTECTION

- Dispersal
- On-site options

Personnel
Fire resistant
filing cabinet

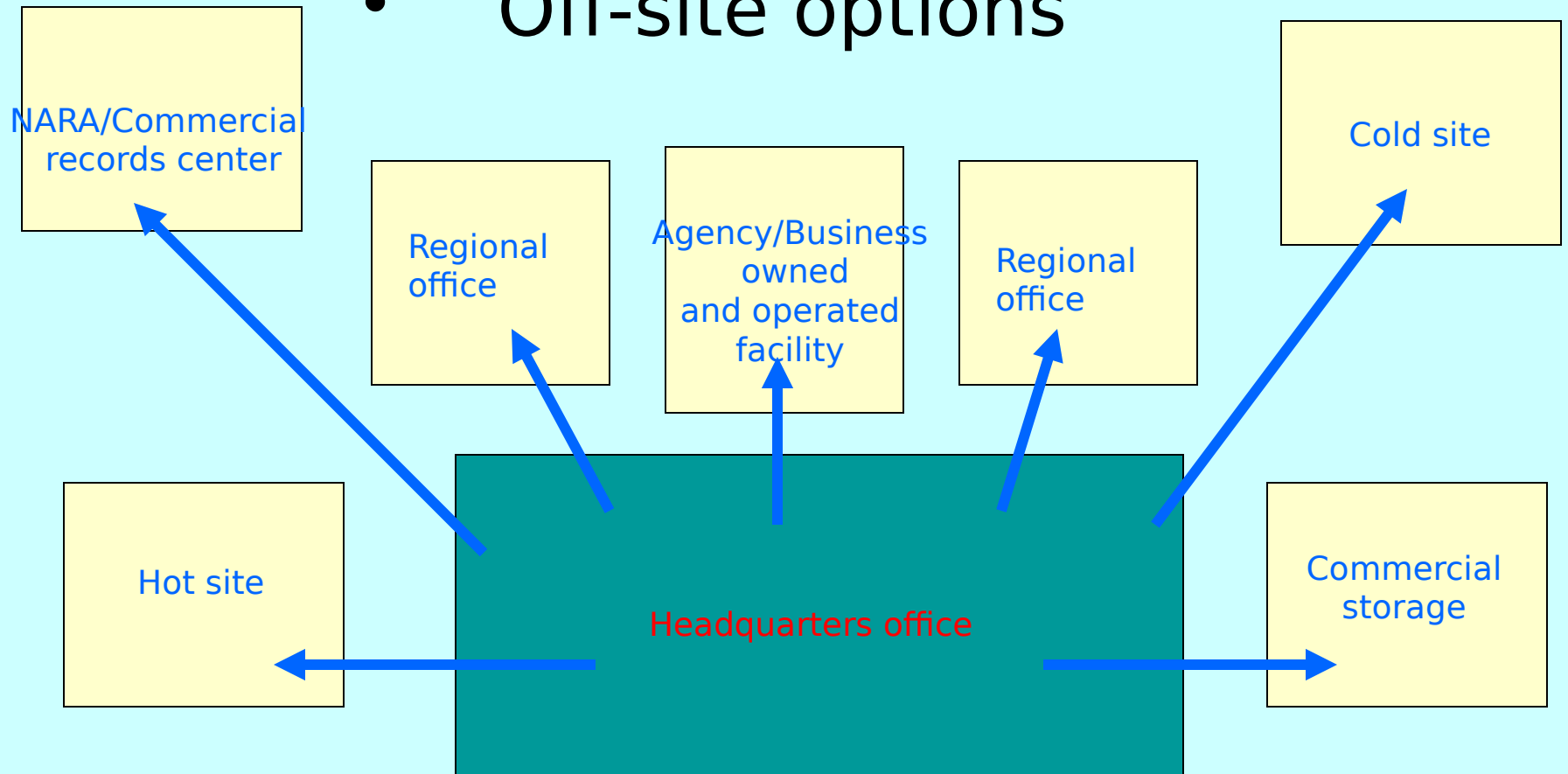
Library
Vital Records building

Headquarters office

Information Systems
Central file room

Finance

- Off-site options



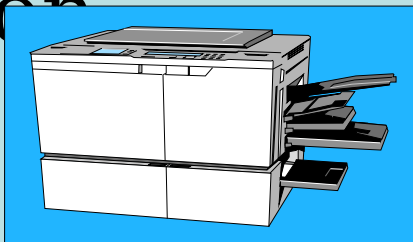
Methods of Protection

Routine,
Automatic
Dispersal

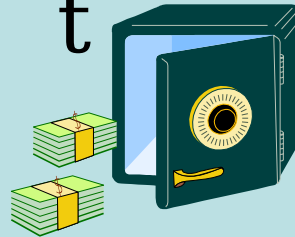
Headquarters
office

Local offices

Duplicati



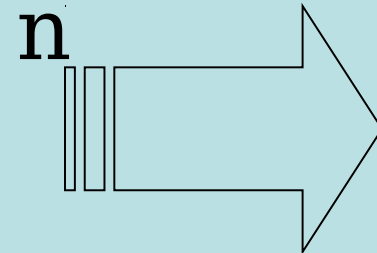
Vault



Planned
Dispersal



Evacuatio



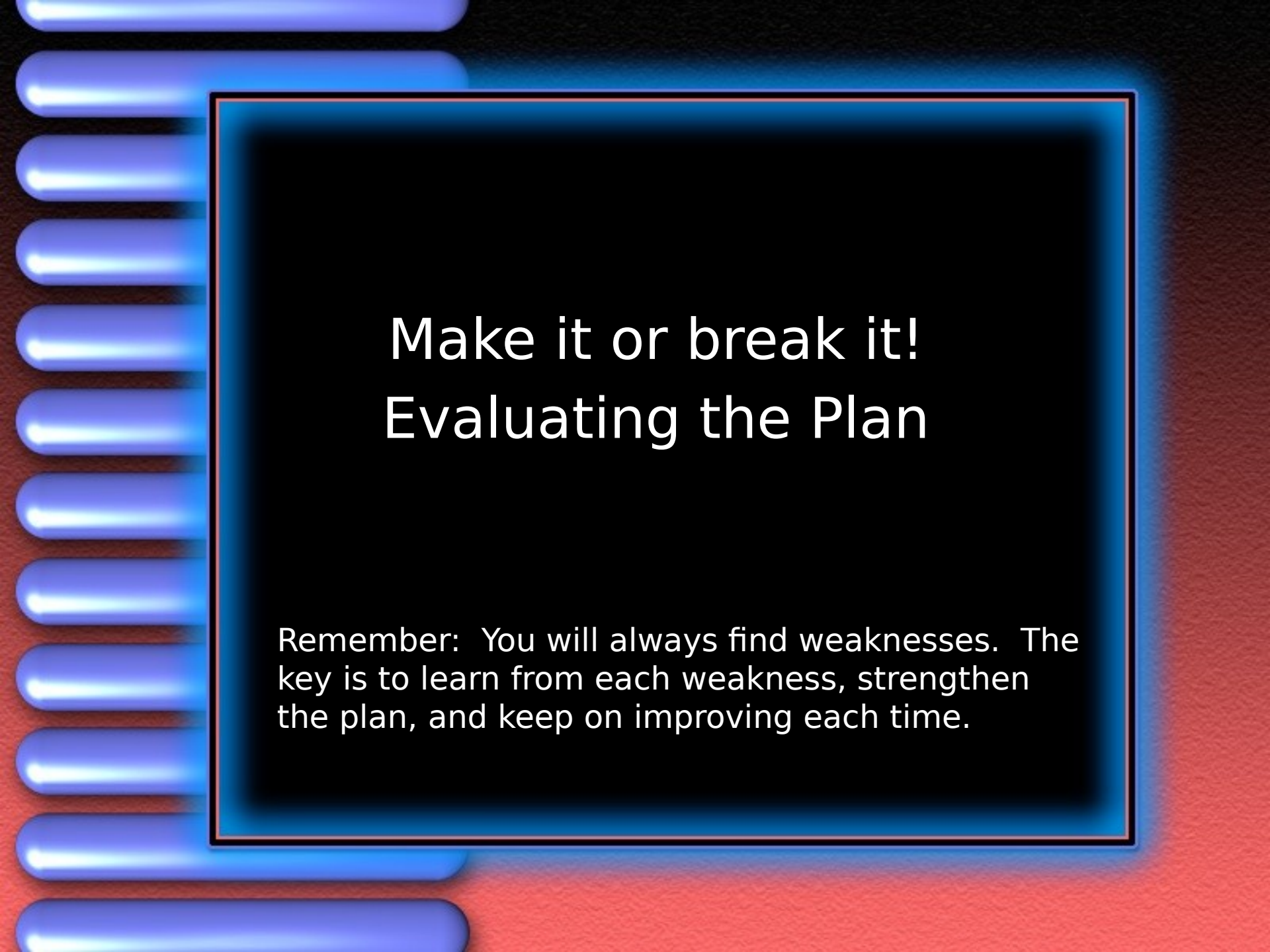
Part 6: Implementation

Issue a Directive and Vital Records Plan

Include purpose and scope of program

- **Assign roles and responsibilities**
- **Provide for staff training**
- **Provide for periodic updates**
- **Provide for regular testing**
- **Issue related guidance and procedures**





Make it or break it!

Evaluating the Plan

Remember: You will always find weaknesses. The key is to learn from each weakness, strengthen the plan, and keep on improving each time.

When an Emergency or Disaster hits...

... it is not the time to go looking for answers!



Things We Need to Know as FEDs

- When we go into COOP mode it is usually Emergency Operations folks, Management and some support staff – not the worker bees who know the records
- Our Agencies must be self-sufficient for at least 31 days
- We must have functional email and access to our hardcopy and electronic vital records within 12 hours of COOP-ing

More Things to Know

- FEMA does not assist Federal Agencies – FEMA may direct another Federal Agency to assist another Fed Agency
- You may not be the responder to the event for some time
- FEMA has Independent Study Courses on line and has Instructor Lead training specific to COOP and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) – most of it is free
- NARA is a 1st Preserver – FEMA ESF 11

Do you know what and
where your vital records
are?

If you answered no, we
can help!

Call Bill Fellers, NARA-
SW Region, Director
Records Management,
817-831-5918
or email
Bill.Fellers@nara.gov

